2328

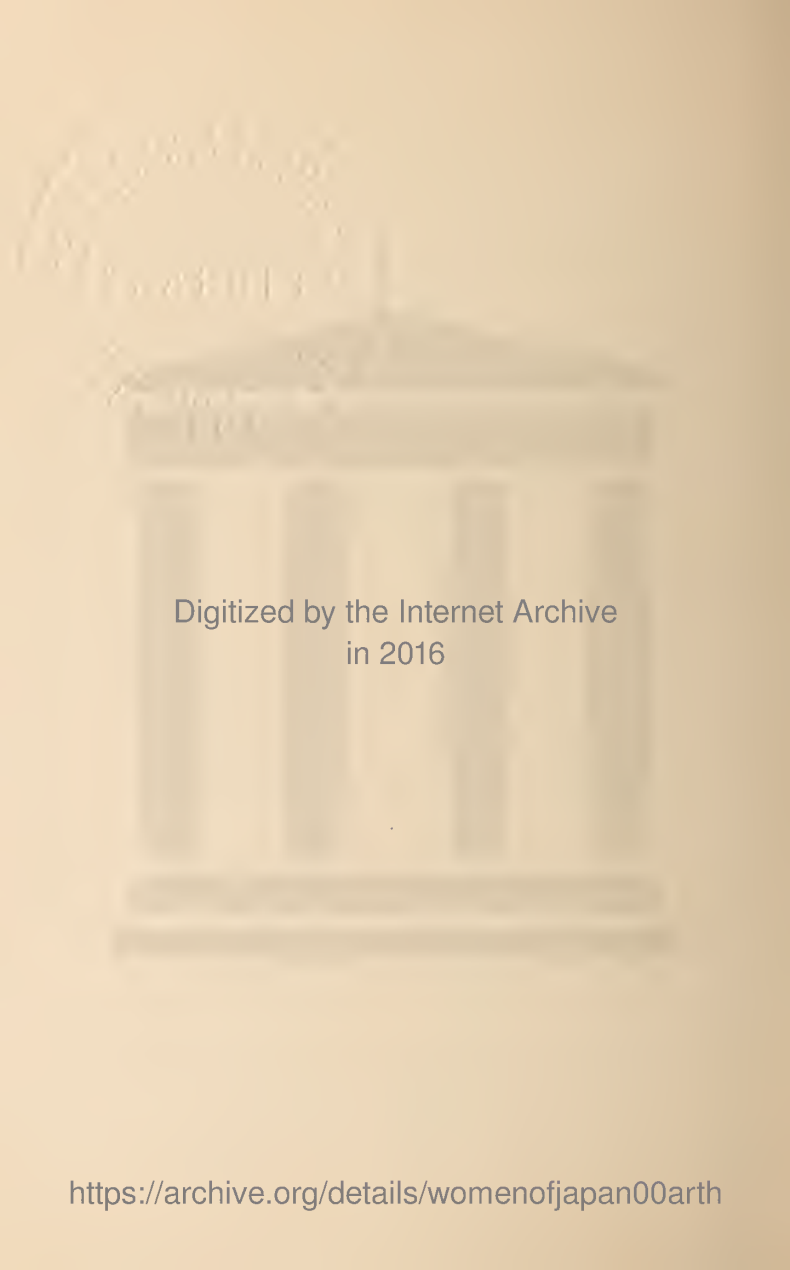
THE

Women of Japan.

BY

MRS. J. H. ARTHUR.

BOSTON:
WOMAN'S BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY.
1880.


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/womenofjapan00arth

THE WOMEN OF JAPAN.

THE religion of Jesus Christ began its course at Bethlehem. It has encircled nearly the whole earth, and to-day is knocking for entrance at the eastern gate of the same continent whence it started. Throughout its course from Bethlehem to the golden gate of the Pacific, this religion has been to woman her resurrection and her life. But, before the gospel's circuit of the world shall be complete, how many myriads in the jungles and cities of Asia wait in the darkness to see their Anointed One, to find their Saviour!

In the spring of 1873, I stood upon the deck of an Atlantic steamer. A company of Japanese students were on board, going down Boston harbor, to bid farewell to Mr. Arinori Mori, who had embarked for England on that steamer. Mr. Mori is a Japanese of fine European education and culture. He is now ambassador from Japan to England. In a few moments' conversation with him, he said to me, "The condition of the women of Japan is deplorable." Mr. Mori sailed eastward to England, I went westward to Japan; and, in four years of life among the women of that country, I found by my own observation that his words were true.

The position of woman in Japan is not so low socially as in many other countries of Asia. During a succession of a hundred and twenty-three mikados, there have been eight ruling empresses. Japanese women are also allowed to hold property. We have not in Japan to contend with distinctions of caste; nor is infanticide practised, as in India. The women do not bind their feet as in China, or smoke opium: on the contrary, the penalty for the use of that narcotic is ten years' imprisonment. "But the religion of Buddha, as believed in Japan, considers woman impure, and offers her but little hope of immortality, unless she is reborn as a man,—which means that there is no salvation for her."

Filial obedience, which is so great a virtue in itself, is carried to excess in Japan, and becomes one of the means to woman's degradation. A daughter will sell herself to the brothel at the command of her parent, and consider it a virtue. An editorial in a secular paper, *The Tokio Times*, pictures some of the evils of this parental bondage. The writer says: "The average Japanese wife is bound down by traditions that make her not only subservient to her husband, but in a greater degree to her husband's father and mother, often to his sisters and brothers. If these parents are of the non-progressive order, conscious of their own inferiority, they will oppose all mental and religious culture in the young wife. They will grind her spirit by menial degradations and excesses of toil, with the avowed intent of rooting out the growth of her new life." The writer then tells "of a young educated Japanese girl, who was wedded to a scholar of her own grade. From the moment of her marriage, her life was made a burden by the cruel impositions of her husband's family, who condemned her to the meanest labors, and tried to ruin her self-respect by placing prostitutes between her and the youth who should have protected her. After years of uncomplaining endurance, urged on by the infliction of still baser insults, she took an unprecedented step. Defying usage and forsaking her family, she began to earn an honest livelihood by the exercise of her own unaided powers. She is now enabled to stand upright before the world, unsubdued by the efforts to brutalize her, and unstained by the vices which spread their corrupting influence around her.

"These sad histories are not exceptional, but are repeated with variations more or less odious from year to year."

These evils of which the writer speaks are brought to the notice of the government, but the government cannot act in advance of the moral convictions of the people. They must be lifted up, enlightened, educated. The missionary women are the most efficient helpers in doing this. "By them the Japanese girl is taught the ordering of a Christian

home, a purer code of morals, a regenerating spiritual power of which Buddhism knows nothing." The missionaries train the Japanese women; and these in turn go out among the people, with the Bible in their hands and love to God in their hearts. Through these Bible-women, the missionaries touch the secret springs of society; with the sweetness and holiness of that Christ who himself was born of woman, they influence the mothers of the land.

The two great religions of the Japanese nation are Shintooism and Buddhism.

Shintooism is the religion of the upper classes. The Shintooists deify their ancestors, worship the sun, and go often on weary pilgrimages. They wash their hands as they enter their temples; and each kneels to worship before a mirror of polished metal, which is supposed to reflect his own consciousness.

Buddhism is the religion of the great masses of the common people. I have often stood at the gate of Asakusa, the principal Buddhist temple in Tokio. I have watched the mothers with their children coming up to worship. They first feed the sacred horse that stands at the gateway and the holy pigeons that swarm down from their nests in the overhanging roofs of the temple. At the door is a box into which they throw their contributions. Then they ring a bell to awaken the gods, and, kneeling at the altar, chew paper prayers, and throw them against the wall. At the right of the altar is a large wooden god, whose face is entirely worn away by the hands of the sick people, who come and rub him, thinking, like that woman of old, that, if they but touch him, they will be healed. Around his neck are a dozen of children's bibs, offerings of mothers for their sick children.

Let us in thought follow one of these women back from the temple, and enter into her home life. As she is walking through the streets, we will glance at her dress. It is a loose robe coming to the feet, and kept in place by a girdle or *obi*, four yards long, wound around the body, and tied in a panier behind. She has no veil or covering on her head,

but her hair is dressed elaborately; for in Japan even the poorest women employ a hairdresser, who visits every house two or three times a week, the charge for such a service being only about a cent for an hour's work. The women so saturate their hair with oil that they do not find it necessary to arrange it more than twice a week. They wear no ornaments except in their hair, which is dressed high on the head, often in the shape of a butterfly or open fan. The number of puffs, together with the style of dressing the hair, indicates whether the person is a wife, a maiden, or a widow. We perhaps notice that this mother as she walks has a baby on her back. She has loosened her outside garment at the neck until it forms a sort of a bag, into which she puts the child; and it is kept from slipping down by the tightness of the obi at the waist. The disadvantage of carrying the child in this way is that its head is thrown back when sleeping, and its face unprotected from the intense rays of the sun. This is thought by physicians to be the cause of much of the blindness prevalent in that country.

When the woman reaches the house, she takes off her sandals, pushes aside the sliding doors of paper, and enters in her stocking feet. The rooms are softly matted, but contain no furniture. The houses are built of wood, and among the poorer classes have but two or three rooms. In the kitchen is a large stone box, with ashes and burning coals in it. This is called the *hibachi*, and over it the rice is cooked. There is no chimney in the kitchen, but the smoke goes out either through an opening in the roof, or imperceptibly through the broad open doors. After the rice is cooked, it is put into a small, unpainted, wooden tub. At dinner time, the mother brings out a little table, two feet square and one foot high, with dishes and food upon it. The family sit upon the mats, the tub of rice is in the centre, and each one dips out into a bowl, from this central dish, rice sufficient for himself. They often pour tea over the rice, and always eat it with chopsticks. Fish, sweet potatoes, and a pickle made from a vegetable called the

daikon, are sometimes served with the dinner. Japanese houses often have but one sleeping-room, which is occupied by the entire family. When guests come, they share it with them. The beds consist of heavy comforters called *futans*. They are spread out on the mats at night, and put away in closets during the day. Each person lays his head, in sleeping, on a little wooden pillow, constructed with a hollow place in which the head may rest.

In some room of the house is a closet containing a shelf for gods; and upon this shelf stand all the household idols which have come down as heirlooms of the family from generation to generation. One of the best tests of the sincerity of the Christian converts in Japan is their willingness to put away these idols; for it proclaims at once to their friends and priests that they have renounced the religion of their fathers. In our own church in Tokio, four women over fifty years of age, on the evening before their baptism, took down from these shelves their sacred household gods, which for half a century they had worshipped, and destroyed them. One threw hers into the river, another hers into the fire, while still another brought an armful of her idols to us. There were household images of Buddha, ancestral tablets, scrolls and medicine charms printed on paper. One of these she had already eaten during an illness, to drive away the evil spirit of disease. This same woman, after becoming a member of the church, came to Miss Kidder, and, laying down her pipe upon the table, said, "I give up this, my last idol, for Christ."

Incidents often occur which show that the worship of these gods is unsatisfying to the people. A woman nearly ninety years of age, coming one day from the country, looked in through our gateway. We invited her to enter. She stayed with us for an hour. She had never before seen a foreign house, nor heard of our religion. On the next Sunday she came at nine o'clock in the morning, and stayed to services during the day. At night she said, "I have lived all my lifetime under God's shadow, and did not know it." As she left us, her words seemed almost like those of Simeon of old,

—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

The occupation of the women of Japan is usually the care of house and children. They sometimes, however, work in the fields and do other heavy labor; but with the care of a large family, and in many cases extreme poverty, their husbands often spending their small earnings in dissipation, the burdens of the mothers in Japan are not light.

On marrying, the women blacken their teeth. This custom has come down from a very beautiful empress, who in devotion to her husband blackened her teeth, that she might become less attractive to others. The children are often betrothed by their parents when very young. Miss Kidder, of Tokio, writes: "This betrothal by the parents is a very hurtful and serious matter, but we missionaries cannot touch it only as the fruits of Christianity shall bring it about. The girls must marry, and universally in their teens; and, if to a heathen, they have, in almost every instance I have known, followed their husbands, and not Christ. . . . This," she says, "is a matter of solicitude in regard to my school of girls"; and she rejoices that in the last year she has been enabled to establish two or three Christian homes. Licentiousness is the great sin which seems to enter in and poison the life of the Japanese women. In the suburbs of the city of Tokio is the Yoshiwara, a collection of beautiful buildings open to the street from basement to roof, and screened with lattice. It is the gateway of ruin to thousands of the women of Japan. It is one of the sources of poison to the blood of the nation. Its fruits are seen in the diseased children in the streets of the lower parts of the city.

The masses of the Japanese people have but little medical knowledge, nor do they seem to understand the simplest sanitary laws. Fruit is gathered when green, and is freely eaten by the children while hard and unripe. The women keep their houses neat and clean, and the streets are swept; but there is a lack of drainage, and slime rises green to the surface of some of the stagnant moats. During the pestilence

of the small-pox, which swept over the land in 1875, the sick were sometimes carried in ambulances through the streets; and children who had only partially recovered from this contagious disease mingled with the crowds of passers by.

When one of a Japanese family is sick, the parents consult the gods. The priests bring charms to drive away the disease, while the Japanese doctor comes with medicine sufficient in quantity and quality to destroy rather than cure. Far more efficient than these is the simple diet allowed of soft boiled rice, and the ignorant but kind nursing of sick children by their mothers. Medical missionaries with a practical knowledge of all the natural laws for the preservation of health, and with experience in nursing the sick, I believe to be nearest in type to that first divine Missionary, who brought not only salvation to the souls of men, but healed also the sick.

The means of education among the Japanese women are limited. There are schools established by government all over the land, where girls may attend, wherein reading and writing are taught in both Japanese and Chinese; but it is a laborious study of years to obtain proficiency in these languages, and, when they are once learned, they open to the learner only a meagre literature, full of impossible stories of foxes and badgers. Is it any wonder that the Japanese nation with its progressive spirit is eager for the English language, when in it they see such an avenue to knowledge reaching out in every direction? If with the acquirement of the English language the Bible shall go into Japan shall not the people, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Son of God, be changed into his likeness in their lives and in their characters?

The Japanese children are early taught strict rules of etiquette. With them it is not so bad to tell a lie as it is to be impolite. An incident, however, may show that this universal law of etiquette is a help to us in reaching the hearts of the people.

O Hama, one of our Bible-women, has a brother, who is a

man holding a position of trust under the government, and is much respected and loved by his family. He has been, however, a devout idolater. When his sister became an earnest Christian worker, he was much displeased, said she was crazy, and that he did not wish to hear anything about Christianity. Nevertheless, his sister after a while came to him, and asked permission to hold meetings at the house with his wife and other women of the family. He granted them the request, on the ground that it did not become a Japanese to be rude or impolite to any one. The meetings were held. The seed planted brought forth fruit. The wife heard and believed. Then the little daughter, when her father went to pray before his idols, came and took his hand, and said, "Pray to the true God: he will listen to you, but this god cannot hear!" Afterward the little child asked her father to lead her to the meetings that were held in Surugadai: he went with her, urging as a reason for his presence the importunity of his daughter. A few months only, and the father came and said: "I have put away my idols out of my house. I believe in and pray to the true God." And to-day the husband, the wife, and the child form a united Christian family.

I sat at a table with a lady in the vicinity of educated Boston, and she said to me, "What a divine religion is Buddhism!" I replied, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and said that Buddhism had not lifted up a single nation of the East, even to semi-civilization; and that Japan, shut up to Buddhism and Shintooism for two thousand years, was the witness to the truth of my statement. Torture and crucifixion used as punishment for the simplest offences; prostitution sanctioned by the government; daughters considering it virtuous to sell themselves to lives of infamy to support their parents; suicide committed for the slightest cause, and life valued but little; the poor, the sick, and the insane suffering from ignorant and superstitious treatment; the nation spending its time and money worshipping foxes and pieces of wood,—these, I said, were the fruits of Buddhism in Japan. But now, when for only twenty-six

years the country has come under the influence of the Christian religion, the whole nation is awakened, and its leaders are beginning to feel that the day of their redemption draweth nigh.

The women of America have begun a good work in Japan. All honor both to those women who have gone, and to those at home who support them! Miss Sands from Yokohama writes me: —

"My only prayer is for many years in Japan. Such a work and such a people! Why do they not send more missionaries? Tell the people how wonderfully the Lord is opening Japan to the gospel."

As Christian churches, we look out upon the seven hundred millions of people who have never heard of Christ, and we say to the missionaries scattered here and there among them: "Watchman, what of the night? What are the signs of promise?" From the land of the Teloogoos and all along the line comes back to us the answer that the darkness is lifting, the day breaking. I believe that the churches should arise in their strength, that they should not only support the missionaries upon the foreign field with the mere necessities for their work, but also, in the spirit of Him who was rich, yet became poor for our sake, give them abundantly, that their work may broaden and deepen.

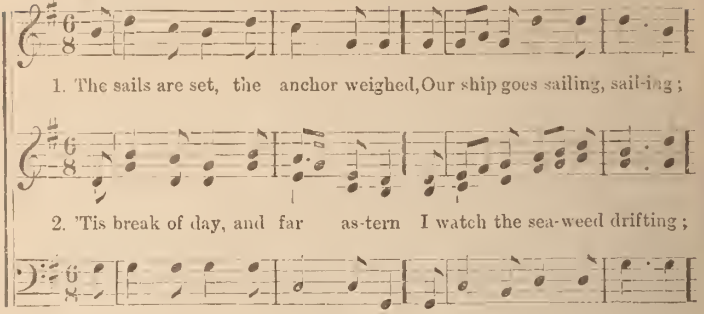
And those of you at home who by your prayers, labors, and gifts support the missionaries upon the foreign field, you share with them in the blessedness of the work, and through them your prayers for the conversion of the world are receiving answers.

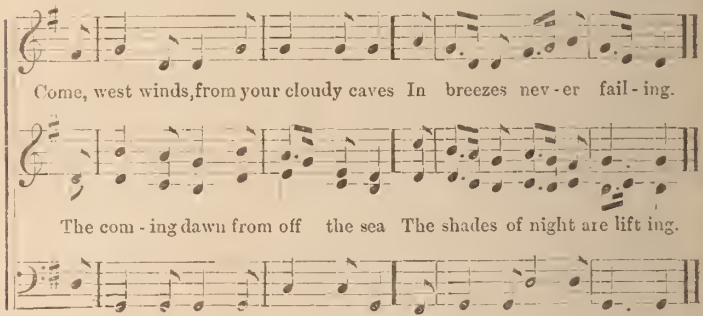
And, because you do thus offer to these heathen women the true bread, to you shall be the promise which our Lord gave those who to their feasts should invite the poor and the blind,— "They cannot recompense you, but ye shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

THE SAILS ARE SET.

Mrs. J. H. ARTHUR. LEONARD MARSHALL.

Andantino.





3

O rays of light from out the East!
Ye bring the voice of wailing;
Come, Holy Spirit, breathe on me
Thy comfort never failing.

4

To lands far-off for thee, O Christ,
I go to tell the story!
Shine thou upon that sea of souls,
And flood it with thy glory.

5

The joys I leave are but to me
As seaweed idly drifting;
For on that sea of human souls
I watch the shadows lifting.

6

Ye west winds blow! Thou ship speed on!
My hopes with thee are sailing;
O Holy Spirit! breathe on me
Thy comfort never failing.

7

So shall my heart for work so great
Be strong in its endeavor,
Until my soul above its fears
Is lifted up forever.